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A
TREATISE
ON THE
NATURE AND CONSTITUTION
OF THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH;
WHEREIN ARE SET FORTH
THE FORM OF ITS GOVERNMENT,
THE
EXTENT OF ITS POWERS,
AND THE
LIMITS OF OUR OBEDIENCE.

BY WILLIAM STEVENS, Esq.

FIRST AMERICAN EDITION.

NEW-YORK:
PRINTED BY T. AND J. SWORDS,
No. 160 Pearl-street.

1803.



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Treatise, extracted chiefly from Archbishop Potter's excellent Discourse concerning Church-Government, it is hoped, will not be deemed a publication, at this time, either unnecessary or useless. It was digested principally with a view to the instruction of a person desirous of information on the Nature and Constitution of the Church; and, it is hoped, that it may be of some benefit to others, who require instruction on the same important subject: this, at least, may be said in its favour, that it lies within a narrow compass, and is level to the capacity of all.

How unnatural it is, that the members of any society should be ignorant of its origin and establishment, the principles on which it was instituted, and the rules and orders by which its credit and dignity have been supported! This ignorance, which, on other occasions, is only extremely absurd, when applied to the principles of our ecclesiastical constitution, is highly reprehensible in itself, and attended with the most dreadful consequences; to this ignorance, the adversary artfully applies himself, under the specious character of a candid inquirer after truth—an advocate for liberty of conscience—and one who makes very great allowance for the scruples of his weak brethren.

Be it our endeavour, by timely information, to prepare ourselves to give a reasonable answer to him that inquireth concerning the faith which we profess, the doctrines which we maintain, and the discipline to which we submit ourselves, in all humility, as the servants of Christ.

This information, we flatter ourselves, may, in some respects, be gathered from the following Treatise, which, without any further apology, is commended to the serious attention of every candid and unprejudiced reader; not without the most earnest desire, that, through God's blessing, it may prosper, to the edification of the ignorant, the conviction of the erroneous, and the establishment of the faithful; that the ever blessed Trinity may be worshipped as such, in all sincerity and truth; that Christians may no longer dissemble with GOD, and with each other, in transactions of the most serious nature; that their conduct may be directed by knowledge, neither swerving towards an enthusiastic contempt of all order and decency on the one hand, nor towards a lukewarm indifference to every thing that is sacred on the other; but "that all who profess and " call themselves Christians, may be led into the way " of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in " the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life."

ON THE CHURCH.



AS the Holy Scriptures are the rule of our faith and practice, it is from them we are to learn the nature and constitution of the Christian Church, the form of its government, the extent of its powers, and limits of our obedience.

I. From the account which the Divine Records have given us of the *Christian Church*, it appears to be no confused multitude of men, independent one on another, but a well-formed and regular society. This is evident from the names and allusions by which it is described. It is called a *family*, whereof Christ is the Master, of *whom the whole family is named*. (a) It is said to be the *city of the living God*; (b) whence Christian people are *fellow-citizens with the saints*. (c) And it is often mentioned as a *kingdom*, of which *Christ is the king*. Thus, in our Lord's words, *Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of Heaven*; (d) where the *Church* and the *Kingdom of Heaven* mean the same thing. As a *family*, a *city*, and a *kingdom*, are societies, and the Christian Church is represented by them, that must likewise be a society.

Some of the chief characters and properties of this society, as described in Holy Scripture, are,

First, That it is not a mere *voluntary* society; but one whereof men are obliged to be members, as they value their everlasting happiness; for it is a society appointed by God, with enforcements of rewards and punishments. That it is of God's appointment is certain; for it is *the Church of the living God*. (e) That it is enforced with rewards and punishments is not

(a) Eph. iii. 14, 15. (b) Heb. xii. 22. (c) Eph. ii. 19.
(d) Mat. xvi. 18, 19. (e) 1 Tim. iii. 15.

less certain : for remission of sins, the grace of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life, are declared to be the privileges of the Christian Church, and annexed to baptism, the constant rite of initiation into the Church ; *Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (f)* And the consequence of neglecting to hear Christ and his apostles may be understood from *Mathew x. 14. Whosoever shall not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for that city.* Now, as God, by instituting this society, and annexing such rewards and punishments, has sufficiently declared his will, that men should enter into it, all men are obliged to become members of it ; and it can in no other sense be called a voluntary society, than as it is left to every man's choice, whether he will be for ever happy or miserable.

Secondly, The Christian Church is a spiritual society. It was founded in opposition to the kingdom of darkness. This is plainly implied in our blessed Saviour's words to St. Peter: Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall never prevail against it. (g) Whence the members of the Christian Church are said to be delivered out of the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of Christ. *(h)* And the Christian people, as soldiers under Christ, are said to fight, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. *(i)* Their armour is not such as will guard them against carnal, but spiritual enemies ; it is the armour of light, *(k)* the armour of God, the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit. *(l)*

(f) Acts ii. 38. *(g)* Mat. xvi. 18. *(b)* Col. i. 13.
(i) Col. ii. 14, 15. *(k)* Rom. xiii. 12. *(l)* Eph. vi. 13.

And this *Spiritual Society*, or *Kingdom of Christ*, was, by the design of its Great Founder, to be distinct from all *earthly kingdoms*. *My kingdom*, says Christ, *is not of this world*: (*m*) for as *earthly kingdoms* are designed for men's *temporal* welfare, so the end of this *heavenly kingdom* is to promote our *everlasting* happiness.

Thirdly, It is an *outward* and *visible* society. The name of Church is constantly applied in the Scriptures to such a society. Thus we find it used by our blessed Saviour himself: *Tell it to the Church*. *If he neglect to hear the Church*. (*n*) It is compared to a *marriage feast*, to a *sheepfold*, to a *net full of fishes*, to a *field of corn*, &c. by which allusions the society of *Christians*, which is the notion implied in the name of *Church*, is evidently described, as a *visible* body of men, taken out of and separated from the rest of the world. Public *rulers* were appointed to govern the Church, the *faith* was to be publicly confessed, the public *worship* of God to be frequented, and *visible* sacraments to be received by all the members of it; and consequently the *Christian Church* is an *outward* and *visible* society.

Fourthly, It is an *universal* society, both with regard to *place* and with regard to *time*. With regard to *place*; for Christ's commission to his apostles was, *to preach the Gospel to every creature*, (*o*) and *to teach and baptize all nations*; (*p*) and with regard to *time*; for it is prophesied concerning Christ's kingdom, that it shall be *established for ever*, as the *sun and moon throughout all generations*; (*q*) and we are told by *St. Paul*, that *Christ must reign, till all his enemies, the last of which is death, shall be put under his feet*, (*r*) which cannot be till the general resurrection; and he himself has promised to be *with his apostles and their successors always, even unto the end of the world*. (*s*)

II. Now, since no well-regulated society ever did

(*m*) John xviii. 36.

(*n*) Mat. xviii. 9.

(*o*) Mark xvi. 15. (*p*) Mat. xxviii. 19. (*q*) Psal. lxxii. 5.

(*r*) 1 Cor. xv. 26, 26.

(*s*) Mat. xxvii. 20.

or can subsist without *officers* to govern it, and without some subordination among these, and since it appears that the Christian Church is a regular society, it must, of necessity, have its *officers*. And as this society is to be continued by a succession of believers to the world's end, it follows, that there must be an uninterrupted succession of *officers* till that time. And as it is a society of God's institution, the *officers* of it must receive their commission from *Him*.

First, That there are *officers* in the *Christian Church* does not admit of doubt: our blessed Lord, the head and founder of it, when on earth, chose twelve that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, whom he named apostles, (t) and gave them power and authority over devils, and to cure all manner of diseases; (v) and besides these, he appointed other seventy. (u) After his resurrection, when he declared, *All power was given unto him in heaven and in earth*, he commissioned his apostles, to teach and baptize all nations, (w) and invested them with the same authority which he had received from his Father; *AS my Father hath sent me, EVEN SO send I you:* (x) as he had received authority to send them, so he gave them authority to send others; and accordingly, when they were further endued with power from on high (y) by the descent of the *Holy Spirit*, whom Christ promised to send, we read, that they ordained the seven deacons, (z) that Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every Church, (a) and Paul ordained Timothy: so that from the beginning, there were three distinct orders of ministers in the Church, namely, that of *deacons*, another of *presbyters*, and over them a superior order, in which were not only the *apostles*, but also Timothy and Titus, who governed the Churches in which they resided.

Secondly, And that there is a subordination among

(t) Luke vi. 12, 13. (v) Luke ix. 1. (u) Luke x. 1.
 (w) Mat. xxviii. 19. (x) John xx. 21.
 (y) Mat. xxviii. 19, 20. (z) Acts vi. (a) Acts xiv. 23.

the officers of this society, is evident from Scripture. For the commission of the *seventy* was more limited and restrained than that of the *twelve*. And as the *apostles* and *disciples* were subject to *Christ*, so were the *elders* and *deacons* to the *apostles*. *St. Paul* sends to *Miletus*, and calls thither the elders of *Ephesus*, to whom he gives a most solemn charge; which is a manifest sign, that they were under his government. (b) And at *Corinth*, where several prophets and evangelists were then present, the same apostle, being absent, both excommunicates, and absolves, and enacts laws. *Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the rest judge.* (c) *If any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge, that the things which I write unto you, are the commandments of the Lord.* (d) And, in like manner, *Timothy*, by virtue of the authority conferred on him by the imposition of *St. Paul's* hands, ruled the whole Church of *Ephesus*, officers as well as private Christians. Whence it is manifest, that as the Christian Church was governed by the three orders of *apostles* or *bishops*, *priests*, and *deacons*, so the supreme authority was lodged in the superior order of the *apostles* or *bishops*, from whom the *priests* and *deacons* derived their power, and without whose consent they could not lawfully perform any religious act.*

(b) Acts xx. 17, &c. (c) 1 Cor. xiv. 29. (d) 1 Cor. xiv. 36, 37.

* During the lives of the Apostles, the three orders of the ministry were distinguished by the names of Apostles, Bishops Presbyters or Elders, and Deacons. After the death of the Apostles, their successors in the first order of the ministry, not chusing to retain the name, which, by way of eminence, had been applied to the twelve, took the name of Bishops, which was never afterwards applied to the second order of the ministry, but was considered as the distinguished name of the first order. Theodoret says expressly, "that in process of time, those who succeeded to the Apostolic office, left the name of Apostle to the Apostles, strictly so called, and gave the name of Bishop to those who succeeded to the Apostolic office." Thus the name of Bishop, and that of Elder or Presbyter, which were promiscuously used for the same office in Scripture, came to be distinct

Thirdly, That there will be an uninterrupted succession of those *officers* in the Church to the world's end, may be inferred from the nature of their functions. Their constant *office* is to prescribe rules for maintaining the outward peace and order of the Church—to preach the Gospel—to admit members into the Church by baptism (*e*)—to take care that there be no schism in the body (*f*)—to administer the eucharist (*g*)—to oppose heresies; (*h*) and therefore their continuance is as necessary as their first institution, so long as the Church shall last: and as that will be to the end of the world, there must be a constant succession of officers till the same time. And that it will be so, we have the assurance of our Lord's promise to his apostles just before his ascension, *Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world:* (*i*) the meaning of which promise must be, that they should always be succeeded by others in the same *office*: for as the apostles all died within the compass of fourscore years after this extensive promise was made, it could no other way be fulfilled,

in the ecclesiastical use of words. With respect to the ministers of Christ, there was a distinction of office from the beginning. St. Ignatius, who lived in the days of the Apostles, thus expressly designates the three offices. "What is the Bishop, but he that hath all authority and power? What is the Presbytery, but a sacred constitution of Counsellors and Assessors to the Bishop? What are the Deacons, but imitators of Christ, and Ministers to the Bishop, as Christ was to the Father." And again, "Follow, as Jesus Christ the Father, your Bishop. Let no man do any thing of what belongs to the Church, without the Bishop. Let that sacrament be looked upon to be firm and effectual which is administered by the Bishop, or by him to whom the Bishop has committed it. Wherever the Bishop is, there let the people be." Bishops, as they are distinct from Presbyters, do not derive their succession from those who are promiscuously called in the New Testament, Bishops or Elders, but from the Apostles themselves and their successors, such as Timothy, Titus, Sylvanus, Epaphroditus, &c.

(*e*) Acts ii. 38, 39.

(*f*) 1 Cor. xii. 4, 12, 18, 24, 28.

(*g*) 1 Cor. xi. 23, 26.

(*h*) 2 Tim. ii. 2.

(*i*) Mat. xxviii. 20.

but by our Lord's *being with* their successors in the Gospel ministry till the *world's end*.

Fourthly, That the *officers* of this society must receive their commission from God, is manifest from *Hebrews v. 4. No man taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God as was Aaron*. Now, besides the plain meaning of the words, which shows, that he who officiates in divine matters is to be set apart, and to have a distinct commission from the rest of mankind, and that this commission must be derived from Divine institution, the necessity of such a Divine commission to qualify a person for any sacred office may be proved by three invincible arguments.

First, From the dignity of the office. It is called an *honour*. The ministers of religion are the representatives of God Almighty: they are *the stewards of the mysteries of God, the dispensers of his holy word and sacraments, the messengers and ambassadors of Heaven*. These characters ascribed to them in Holy Scripture sufficiently demonstrate the dignity of their function, and are a plain argument, that *none but God himself* can give them their commission.

Secondly, From the constant practice among the Jews. The apostle makes the calling of *Aaron* the pattern of all other ministers in the Jewish and Christian Church. *Aaron* and his sons, and the Levites were consecrated by the express command of God to *Moses*, and they had all of them their *distinct commission* from Heaven, and no less than *death* was the penalty of invading their office. (*k*) What *Aaron* and his sons, and the Levites were in the temple, such are the Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons, in the Christian Church.

These are appointed by God as *those* were, and therefore it can be no less sacrilege to usurp their office.

Thirdly, From the example of our Saviour, who (as

(*k*) Numb. iii. 10.

the apostle speaks) *glorified not himself to be made an high priest, but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to-day have I begotten thee.* (1) Though our Saviour wanted no gift to qualify him for this office, as having the *Divine nature* inseparably united to his *human*, yet he would not enter upon his office till he was externally commissioned thereunto by the visible descent of the Holy Ghost upon him, and an *audible voice* from Heaven, proclaiming him to be the Messiah. From all which it is evident, that no one ought to exercise the office of a minister in the Church of God without a Divine commission; and that as the officers of the Christian Church, Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, were appointed by God, this, like every other Divine institution, must remain in the same state till it shall please God to change or wholly lay it aside; for men may with the same reason abolish the sacraments of the Church, and all other Christian institutions, as pretend that the functions of Church officers are mutable and temporary.

III. As no society can subsist without *officers*, so neither can it without *power* to do all things which are necessary to its own preservation and good government; and as it appears, that the Church is a society instituted by God, and designed to last to the world's end, there can be no doubt but that he has invested it with all the powers which the nature of such a society requires.

First, As the Church is a spiritual society, all the *powers* which belong to it are of the same nature, and such as wholly relate to the next world; consequently they are distinct from those of *civil* magistrates, which concern the affairs of this life, and are designed for the present welfare of human societies. Our Lord himself wholly disclaimed all civil power, and left the civil rights of mankind in the same state wherein he found them. And when the *apostle* exhorts the *Hebrews* to yield obedience to their *pastors*, he restrains

(1) Heb. v. 5.

it to the affairs of their *souls*, for which their *pastors* were accountable to God: *Obeys them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account.* (m)

Secondly, As God has appointed *officers* to govern his Church, the powers which he has committed to his Church for its good government must ordinarily be executed by them. For every *office* implies *power*, and to say that the *officers* of the Church have no *power* but what all private *Christians* may lawfully exercise, is just the same as to say there are no such *officers* at all. And as there are distinct *offices*, so there must be distinct *powers* appropriated to every one of them; for as the notion of an *office* implies *power*, so distinct *offices* do necessarily imply distinct *powers*: and therefore, though the Scriptures had been silent in this matter, it might safely have been concluded, from the different kinds of *officers* whom *Christ* hath intrusted with the care and government of his Church, not only that private *Christians* are excluded from the ordinary execution of any ecclesiastical *power*; but that some powers are appropriated in such a manner to the chief *officers*, that they cannot lawfully be exercised by those of lower orders. The *officers* of the Church are called God's *stewards*, who are intrusted with the care and government of his *household*, that is, his Church; and whose business and duty it is to dispense their constant *food*, i. e. the *word* and *sacraments* to all the members of it; whence it is plain, that private *Christians* have no power to dispense the *ordinances* of the Gospel to others, but must themselves expect them from the hands of *God's ministers*. And the names of apostles and angels, whereby the *officers* of the Church were distinguished from other *Christians* in the *apostolic* age, manifestly imply, that they acted by a commission from God, to which the rest had no title. And however great the gifts and abilities of private *Christians* might be, none had

(m) Heb. xiii. 17.

power to exercise any function or office in the Church, who had not been first approved and *commissioned* by those whom God had invested with authority to that end; for through the whole New Testament the gifts or abilities of Church-officers are every where distinguished from their *commission*, and *described* as previous qualifications to it.

Thirdly, What these powers of the Church are, and to whom each of them belongs in *particular*, the Scripture will inform us. They may be reduced under the following heads, *viz.* The *power*, 1. Of *preaching*. 2. Of *prayer*. 3. Of *baptism*. 4. Of *celebrating the Lord's Supper*. 5. Of *confirming persons baptized*. 6. Of *ordaining ministers*. 7. Of *making canons*. 8. Of *jurisdiction*. 9. Of *demanding maintenance*.

First, The first of these *powers* is that of *preaching* the Gospel, which naturally precedes all the rest, because it is the means which God has been pleased to appoint for converting men to the *Christian* faith, in order to bring them into his Church, wherein the other *powers* are exercised. None have a right to preach without a *commission*; for *how shall they preach except they be sent?* (*n*) Our Lord himself was *sent* and *commissioned* by the Father *to preach the Gospel*, (*o*) and this was one of the functions to which he was *anointed* by the *Holy Spirit*. In like manner he solemnly *called* and *set apart* his *apostles* to this *office*, (*p*) and gave them *commission* to *teach all nations*. (*q*) And this branch of the apostolic office, *viz.* *preaching* the Gospel, was derived to their successors the *Bishops*. Hence *St. Paul* charges *Timothy* to *preach the word*, (*r*) and one previous qualification required of such as were to be ordained *Bishops*, is, *that they be apt to teach*; (*s*) but this *power* was not confined to the *Bishops*, or superior order of ministers in the Church, for the apostle calls the *Presbyters* his fellow-

(*n*) Rom. x. 14, 15. (*o*) Luke iv. 18. (*p*) Mark iii. 14. vi. 7.
 (*q*) Mat. xxviii. 19. (*r*) 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2. (*s*) 1 Tim. iii. 2.

labourers, that his associates in preaching the Gospel; and *Philip*, who was only a *Deacon*, preached the word in *Samaria*. All the different orders, exercised this function; the *Bishops*, as invested with the plenitude of power, the *Priests* and *Deacons* by an authority derived from them.

Secondly, Another religious act, which has always been appropriated to the *Clergy*, is offering to God the prayers of the Church. In secret, every man is his own orator; and in private families, performance of divine worship is incumbent on them, to whom the care and government of the family belong; but in the public congregations of *Christians*, divine worship must be celebrated only by those to whom it has pleased God to commit this office. The presenting of the people's prayers to God, and interceding with him to bless them, has always been reckoned an essential part of the *sacerdotal* office. The apostles join the offices of *preaching* and *prayer* together: *We*, say they, *will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.* (t) *St. James* directs sick persons to send for the *Presbyters* of the Church to pray and intercede for them, (v) that their sins may be forgiven. And the *twenty-four Elders* in the *Revelation*, who represent the ministers of the *Christian Church*, have every one of them golden vials full of incense, which is the prayers of the saints. (u)

Thirdly, The next power is that of admitting members into the Church by *baptism*. This is expressed in the commission which our *Lord* gave to his apostles just before his ascension: *Go, teach all nations, baptizing them.* (w) Yet was it never understood to be so strictly appropriated to them, but that it might lawfully be exercised by inferior ministers. For we find that *Philip*, the *Deacon*, baptized the *Samaritans* and the *Ethiopian eunuch*. (x) Hence, though the power of *baptism* belongs chiefly and primarily to the *Bishops*,

(t) Acts vi. 4. (v) James v. 14. (u) Rev. v. 8.
 (w) Mat. xxviii. 19. (x) Acts ix.

yet it belongs also to the *Presbyters*, who are the bishops' assistants in the care and government of the Church; and may lawfully be committed to *Deacons*; but neither *Presbyters* nor *Deacons* ought to baptize without the Bishop's allowance.

Fourthly, Another power which our Lord has left to his Church is, that of consecrating the *eucharist*, or *Lord's Supper*. The first *eucharist* was consecrated by our Lord himself a little before his passion. At the same time he gave his *apostles* commission to do, as he had done; *Do this*, said he, *in remembrance of me.* (y) Yet this office was not so strictly appropriated to the *apostles*, but that it might be lawfully executed by the ministers of the second order; whence we find, that the *eucharist* was consecrated in the Church of *Corinth*, when no minister above the order of *Presbyters*, who were next below the apostles, was there. The reason why *Deacons* were not allowed to consecrate the *Lord's Supper* was, because this sacrament was always believed to succeed in the place of *sacrifices*; and as none beside the *high priest*, and inferior priests, were permitted to offer sacrifices under the *Jewish law*, so none but *Bishops* and *Presbyters*, who alone are *priests* in the *Christian* sense of that name, consecrated the *Lord's Supper*.

Fifthly, A further power which belongs to the Church is that of imposing hands on persons baptized, commonly called *confirmation*. The Scripture gives us the following account of the exercise of this power: When *Philip*, the *Deacon* and *Evangelist*, had converted and baptized the Samaritans, the *apostles* which were at Jerusalem sent unto them Peter and John, who having prayed and laid their hands on them, they received the *Holy Ghost*, who was before fallen upon none of them; only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (z) When the twelve disciples at *Ephesus* had been baptized by *Timothy*, or some other of *St. Paul's* assistants, *Paul* laid his hands on them, and the *Holy*

(y) Luke xxii. 19.

(z) Acts viii. 14, 17.

Ghost came upon them. (a) From which passages these two things appear: *First*, That the end and design of this *office* was to confer the *gifts* of the *Holy Ghost* upon persons lately baptized. *Secondly*, That it was so strictly appropriated to the *apostles*, that it could not ordinarily be performed even by inspired men, and workers of miracles, who were of no inferior *order*. And that it was not a temporary institution, but one which was *fundamental* to *Christianity*, and consequently lasting and perpetual, is plain from its being called a *principle* and foundation; and joined with some of the most essential duties and articles of the *Christian* religion. *Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptism, and of laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

Sixthly, Another power mentioned as belonging to the Church is that of *ordaining ministers*. It having been shown that there must always be *ministers* of different *orders* in the Church; and that no man can *ordinarily* exercise any ecclesiastical *office*, or function, who is not lawfully called to it; the next inquiry is, from whom this *call* or *commission* must be expected?

Now, the original of this commission is from God, the Father, by whom our Lord was sent into the world to mediate between God and man, as he himself witnesseth. *As thou hast sent me into the world, saith he to the Father, even so have I also sent them into the world;* (b) and to his apostles, *As my Father sent me, even so send I you.* (c) So that the whole power of erecting the *Christian* Church, and of governing it since it was erected, is derived from the *Father*.

But then the person by whom this power is immediately conferred is the *Holy Spirit*, the third person in the blessed and undivided Trinity. He it was, by whose anointing our *Lord* was invested with his media-

(a) Acts xix. 6. (b) John xvii. 18. (c) John xx. 21.

torial office. Whence he is said to have *preached by the Spirit*; (d) *through the Holy Spirit he gave commandments to the apostles whom he had chosen.* (e) *By the Spirit of God he cast out devils. Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself to God,* (f) and the authority and special grace, whereby the *apostles* and all *church-officers* execute their respective functions, are in the same manner ascribed to the Spirit. This was expressed in the very form of the apostles' ordination, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.* (g) Where the authority to remit and retain sins is made a consequence of their receiving the Holy Ghost. And *St. Paul* ascribes to the same Spirit both the offices of the apostles and other ministers, and their abilities to discharge those offices. (h) So that all ecclesiastical authority is the gift of the Holy Spirit. But the question is, What persons God has entrusted with authority to *ordain* ministers in the Church?

And if we may be allowed to reason from the constitution and universal practice of civil societies, we must conclude, that the power of *ordaining* ministers belongs to the *Bishops*, who are the chief governors of the Church, because the power of constituting subordinate magistrates belongs to the supreme governors of all civil societies: and it is contradictory to reason, that they who exercise any authority, whether in the Church or in the state, should derive their authority from any but those in whom the supreme authority is lodged.

Accordingly, we find in the Gospel, that whilst our *Lord* lived on earth, he reserved the power of *ordaining* ministers to himself. He gave the *apostles* and the *seventy disciples* a commission to preach, but never allowed them, while he continued among them, to communicate that commission to any other. After-

(d) Luke iv. 18. (e) Acts i. 2. (f) Heb. ix. 14.
 (g) John xxii. 22, 23. (h) 1 Cor. xii. 1. 31. Eph. iv. 7, 8, 11.

wards, when the apostles were the chief visible governors of the Church, they ordained *Ministers*. All the *Apostles* together ordained the seven *Deacons* in the Church of *Jerusalem*. (i) *Paul* and *Barnabas* ordained *Elders* in every Church which they visited. (k) In the same age, this authority was exercised by others whom the apostles had ordained to be chief governors of Churches. *Timothy* and *Titus* ordained ministers in their respective dioceses of *Ephesus* and *Crete*: but that no inferior order had this power is evident. *St. Paul* tells *Titus*, that for this cause he left him in *Crete*, that he might ordain *Elders* in every city. (l) But this could be no cause of leaving him there, if the *Presbyters* or *Elders* had the power of ordination lodged in them: for that island had been converted to Christianity long before this epistle was written, and before *Titus* came thither: and no doubt there were many *Presbyters* among them. The same may be said of *Timothy's* being sent to *Ephesus*. To what purpose was he sent thither, if the *Presbyters* there before had power to ordain? So that it appears from Scripture, and from the nature of the episcopal office, that none but Bishops have authority to ordain Ministers in the Church; and, consequently, none but those who are ordained by them, can be truly said to have a *divine commission*, or any authority to minister in the *Christian Church*.

Seventhly, The next power to be mentioned, which the Church exercised in the primitive ages, was that of making *canons*, or laws for the behaviour of its members in *spiritual* affairs. Whereby it is not meant, that the Church has authority to change any of the divine laws, or impose any article of faith, or rule of moral duty, or to prescribe any condition of salvation, which is neither expressly contained in the Scriptures, nor can certainly be concluded from them; but only that she is invested with power in all such things as relate to the outward peace and order of the Church.

(i) Acts vi. 3, 16. (k) Acts xiv. 23. (l) Titus i. 5, 9.

And if it appears that things of this kind are left undetermined by the Scriptures, and also that it is necessary they should be determined, then we cannot doubt but that Christ has intrusted the Church with authority to determine them. Now, that these are not particularly determined by Scripture, is very evident. For the rules of Scripture are all general. We are commanded to *assemble* together to worship God; but the times and places are not expressed. We are commanded to *follow such things as make for peace and edification*, and to *do all things decently and in order*; but the particular methods whereby order must be maintained, and edification promoted, are no where set down. *Timothy*, and all other Bishops with him, are commanded to *lay hands suddenly on no man*; but the previous trials of such as are candidates for holy orders, and the time and methods of examination into their abilities and behaviour, are left undetermined. But it is necessary that these things should be determined; for otherwise nothing but disorder and confusion would be seen in the Church, and therefore Christ has certainly left the governors of his Church authority to determine them. And, accordingly, if we inquire into the practice of the apostles, and other primitive governors of the Church, we shall find, that, besides the standing rules of the Gospel, they established many regulations, as the several occasions of the Churches under their care required. In many of *St. Paul's* epistles, especially in those to the *Corinthians*, he prescribes particular rules for the decency of divine worship, the avoiding of scandal, and other things which were not determined by *Christ*; and he speaks of customs which he himself and other apostles established and the Churches observed. (m) There is, and ever will be the same necessity of prescribing rules for the peace and good government of the Church, and the order and decency of divine service, that there was in the *apostolic* age: and, conse-

quently, there is the same reason why this authority should be transmitted to the Bishops in all ages, as in any other part of the *apostolical* office.

Eightly, From the *power* of making *laws*, we proceed to that of *jurisdiction*, or executing the laws; that is, the power of *judging* and *censuring* offenders. That our blessed Lord has intrusted the *Church*, and particularly the *governors* of it, with authority to *censure* offenders, and to *exclude* them from its *communion*, will appear, if we consider the Church, first, as a *society*; for this authority is exercised by all societies whatever. And as in *civil* societies this authority is necessary for securing men's lives and properties, which is the chief end for which it pleased God to institute these societies; so in the Church or *spiritual* society, the same authority is equally necessary to attain the ends for which the Church was founded; namely, to maintain the purity of divine worship, to secure men from the pollutions of the world, and train them up in virtue and piety now, in order to make them happy for ever; all which cannot be effected if the Church has not power to exclude from its communion such unworthy members as endeavour to oppose these ends, by promoting vice, superstition, and infidelity.

Secondly, As a Society, the privileges whereof are conditional; for none must be admitted into the Church by baptism, who do not, by themselves, or their sureties, profess the faith, and vow obedience to the laws of Christ; and if these conditions are necessary for men's admission into the Church, they must be so for their continuance in it. For no reason can be shown why men should be obliged to vow faith and obedience in order to their becoming members of the Church, which does not equally hold for their *exclusion* from it when they notoriously break that vow: so that the power of *excommunication* is a manifest consequence of the *baptismal* covenant, and committed to the governors of the Church, who have the dispensation of the sacraments.

Thirdly, As it has received this power from our Lord's institution. Upon *Peter's* confessing our Lord to be the *Son of God*, he declared first, that upon *this rock* he would build his Church, against which the gates of hell should never prevail; and then added, *I will give unto thee* (that is, to *Peter*, and with him to the rest of the apostles) *the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven:* (n) the meaning of which promise is manifestly this, that the apostles and their successors should be chief governors of the Church under Christ, and as such, should have authority to admit and exclude, to condemn or absolve, whom they judged convenient; which is certain from another passage, where our Lord, having cautioned his disciples that they should not offend others, proceeds to instruct them how to behave themselves when others should offend them. That first they should privately admonish the offender; if this did not bring him to repentance, they should then reprove him before two or three witnesses; but if this also proved unsuccessful, their last remedy should be to tell it to the Church; and if the offender still neglected to hear, as their authority was wholly spiritual, and they could not inflict any civil punishment on him, all that our Lord directs them to do is, that they should account the obstinate offender as an heathen or a publican, (o) they should look on him no longer as a member of the Church, but place him among infidels, and other profligate men, whose conversation they used to shun.

That this authority was exercised and held to be of divine right by the Apostles and their successors the Bishops of the primitive Church, is clear; from the case of *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, when it pleased God to attest the apostolic authority of retaining sins, by enabling *Peter* to strike both the offenders with present death: (p) and from the case of the incestuous *Corin-*

(n) Mat. xvi. 19. (o) Mat. xviii. 15, 16, 17. (p) Acts v. 12.

thian, (q) whom *St. Paul* delivered to *Satan*, excluded from the Church of Christ, from the crime of incest, and afterwards received again to communion upon repentance. And this power was not confined to the apostles, but was to be continued to their successors: We find it was committed to *Timothy* and *Titus*, whom *St. Paul* set over the Churches of *Ephesus* and *Crete*. For he writes thus to *Timothy*: *Against an Elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses;* (r) and if he had power to receive accusations and hear witnesses, he must have authority to pass some censure upon them, if they were found guilty. And the same apostle writes thus to *Titus*: *A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject.* (s) The like power had the angels of the seven Churches in the Revelation. For the *Bishop* of *Pergamus* was severely reprov'd for having the *Nicolaitans* in his communion, (t) and the *Bishop* of *Thyatira* for suffering that woman *Jezebel*. (v) Which manifestly implies, they had authority to exclude them from the Church, for otherwise they could not have been blamed for permitting them to remain in it.

Ninthly, Lastly, another right of the Clergy is that of demanding a competent maintenance from the people committed to their charge. It is certain that God has an absolute right to dispose of all we have in the world; and since it has appeared, that he has appointed an order of men to attend continually on his worship and service, we cannot doubt but that he requires so much of our worldly substance to be set apart for their support, as may enable them to discharge the duties of their function, and such as may express the just respect which is borne to their office and character. Our Lord himself, with his retinue of *Apostles* and *Disciples*, was maintained by charitable contributions; for we read that many ministered unto him of their substance. (u) When he sent forth his *Apostles*

(q) 1 Cor. v. 1. (r) 1 Tim. v. 19. (s) Tit. iii. 10.
 (t) Rev. ii. 15, 16. (v) Rev. ii. 20. (u) Luke viii. 2, 3.

to preach, he gave them this instruction, *Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses, for the workman is worthy of his meat.* (w) Whence it is manifest, that our Lord accounted it the duty of those to whom the Gospel was preached, to give a competent maintenance to them that preached it. When the apostle *St. Paul* puts the *Thessalonians* in mind, that he had maintained himself, he at the same time asserts his right to require maintenance of them: *Not* (says he) *because we have not power.* (x) And to the *Corinthians* he says, *That as they who wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar, even so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel.* (y) Where it is plain, that the Ministers of the Gospel have authority to require a competent maintenance from the people committed to their care; and as the privileges of the Gospel certainly are not less than those of the law, and the Apostle has inferred, that the Ministers of Christ ought to live of the Gospel, because the Jewish priests lived of the altar, we may reasonably conclude, that their maintenance must not be less in proportion than that which the Jewish priests enjoyed.

IV. As it appears that the Church is a complete society, wherein some govern, and others are governed, the next thing to be determined is, What obedience is due from the private members of this society to their governors? That all lay-christians do owe some obedience to their spiritual rulers, is evident from our Lord's command to *hear the Church,* (z) and the injunction of the Apostle, *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account.* (a) The Church which we are to hear, is to be known from the foregoing description of it; and the rulers to whom we are to yield obedience, and submit ourselves, are they who derive their commission by an uninterrupted suc-

(w) Mat. x. 9, 10. (x) 2 Thess. iii. 8. (y) 1 Cor. ix. 6.
 (z) Mat. xviii. 17. (a) Heb. xiii. 17.

cession from *Christ* and his Apostles. Wherein this obedience to our rulers consists, and what are the limits of it, we may learn from the nature and extent of their power; for so far as they have a right to command, so far are we bound to obey. Now all things that are in the world may be divided into *good*, *bad*, and *indifferent*. The *good* oblige by their own nature, and the command of God; in these things the authority of our governors is of no force; for whatever is enjoined by the positive command of God, we are bound to do, whether they require it or not. The *evil* are by the same forbidden, and we are obliged not to obey our governors, if they should command them. So that it is the *indifferent* only whereto their authority reaches; and the things which are *indifferent* in themselves are *all* those which relate to the outward peace and order of the Church; which are not enjoined by the express word of God, but yet are in no respect contrary to it, in no wise forbidden by it. This authority was exercised by the Governors of the Church from the beginning (as hath been shown), and it undoubtedly belongs to them; for as they are evidently invested with some spiritual authority, and they can command in nothing at all if not in *indifferent* things, in all such things as are indifferent they certainly have a right to command. And as is their authority, such is to be our submission. So that the obedience we owe to our spiritual governors consists in observing all their injunctions, that are contained within these bounds of their commission; in submitting to that discipline, which they shall inflict, either to recover us from a state of folly, or to preserve us from falling into it; in attending their *public administrations* at such *times* and *places* as they shall appoint, and upon such occasions as they shall judge proper, to increase our piety and devotion; and in submitting to such regulations as they shall think conducive towards the *edifying of the body of Christ*. This is our duty; for things which are in-

different in their *nature*, when commanded by lawful *authority*, are no longer indifferent to us, but become *necessary* in their use; and in disobeying them that have *the rule over us*, we disobey God, who has commanded us to be *subject for conscience sake*; and therefore all this we are to do, from a sense of that right which they have to command, intrusted to them by God our Saviour, and of that great penalty to which we are liable by our contempt; *for he that despiseth them, despiseth Him that sent them.*

FINIS.

ERRATUM.

In page 9, (note) 7th line from the bottom, for “distinguished” read *distinguishing*.



